

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS
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DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

January 11th, 1954

Mr. Alden H. Emery, Executive Secretary,
American Chemical Society,
1155 16th Street, N.W.,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Emery,

I am indeed grateful for your reply to my letter concerning the denial of membership to Mme. Irene Joliot-Curie and only the busy activities of the holiday season have prevented me from answering your letter sooner. I must say that I am profoundly disturbed at the apparent infection of our beloved Society by the prevailing virus of fear and apprehension.

Let me assure you at the outset that had I been a member of the Admissions Committee and had Mme. Joliot-Curie's husband applied for membership my vote would have been an emphatic "No". The reason would not have been that Joliot-Curie is an "avowed Communist", for his scientific work is above reproach. I would have refused him membership for his charge that the United States was guilty of using bacteriological warfare in Korea, a subject upon which he could not possibly have had first-hand information in Paris. However, Mme. Joliot-Curie's case is different. I am assured by one of her close friends who has known her since early youth that Mme Joliot-Curie never joined the Communist party because there was much that she did not like about it, and she had too little time to work for it. I am therefore at a loss to imagine how Elisha Hanson can call her "an avowed Communist". Radical she certainly is, but since there is no question of her competence as a chemist I do not see why her politics should concern our Society. Nor do I see why we should condemn her because "her government dropped her from an important position". Actually, she served until her term expired. How would we have felt if the Société Chimique de France had refused membership to Dr. Astin some months ago because our government removed him as Director of the Bureau of Standards?

And that brings me to the main reason for being disturbed. Since when has there been a political requirement for admission to our Society? Do you mean to tell me that if any one of the present leaders in organic, physical, or biological chemistry in Russia or Central Europe were to apply for membership he would be refused because he might be a communist? Is the American Chemical Society as isolationist as that in a world in which we are going to have to live with communists for many years or face mutual annihilation? And

are you going so far as to suggest use of a provision in the constitution of our Society to expel a member who might happen to be a communist? Is this not a thoroughly un-American attitude and one directly counter to our American constitution and the Bill of Rights? It seems to me that we harm, cheapen and debase ourselves far more in keeping out of or putting out from the Society a few Communists than any conceivable damage they could do within the Society.

It appears to me, too, that to expect all new or old members "to develop the country's industries" is a rather odd requirement, and if that is a prime objective we had better consolidate with the Society of Chemical Industry. I am sure that in academic circles, at least, loyalty to our science and "fostering public welfare" are what bind us together in proud membership. And if I judge my friends in industry correctly they would not use "to develop the country's industries", either, as a more important criterion of fitness than the first two.

I most earnestly urge that in these difficult times we conduct ourselves objectively and courageously as adults and as scientists. If we do that we need not worry about having a few communists with us. Let us invite more of them--they have much to learn from us.

Confidently yours,

MH:jm

Michael Heidelberger